United Nations DP/2015/17

# Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Distr.: General
12 March 2015

Original: English

**Annual session 2015**
1-12 June 2015, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
**Evaluation**

## Evaluation of the contribution of global and regional Human Development Reports to the public policy process

### Executive summary

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15-03877 (E) 260315

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# I. Introduction

1. In recognition of the important contribution of the global and regional Human Development Reports (HDRs) to public debate and public policy, the Executive Board approved the evaluation of their contribution to the public policy process at its first regular session of 2014, as part of the medium-term plan of the Independent Evaluation Office (DP/2014/5). The evaluation took place within the overall provisions of the UNDP Evaluation Policy.

2. The evaluation assessed the contributions of global and regional HDRs published from 2004 to 2013. The period encompasses reports produced since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/264 of 20 December 2002, which affirmed the importance of global HDRs. As this is the first independent evaluation of the global and regional HDRs, the evaluation also took into account the contribution of HDRs between 1990 and 2003 and examined how HDRs have progressed over time. Specifically, the evaluation aimed to: (a) assess the contribution of global HDRs to intellectual and analytical public policy debates; (b) assess the contribution of regional HDRs to policy discourse and advocacy at the regional level and public policy processes at the national level; (c) assess the contributions of global and regional HDRs to UNDP engagement in global and regional public discourse and advocacy and national public policy processes; (d) identify factors that explain the contributions of global and regional HDRs; and (e) present key findings, conclusions and recommendations to inform management decisions.

3. The evaluation covered the contribution of thematic analysis, human development data (e.g., data on indices and on different themes); background papers for the global HDRs; thematic analysis and data of the regional HDRs; and development and policy actors in all five geographic regions where UNDP works (Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Latin America and the Caribbean).

# II. Background

4. UNDP launched the first global HDR in 1990 and since has produced 23 global reports. These reports seek to raise awareness of and generate debate on public issues and concerns. In resolution 49/123 of 19 December 1994, the General Assembly affirmed that the HDR is the result of an independent intellectual and separate and distinct exercise from other activities of UNDP. In resolution 57/264, the Assembly acknowledged that the HDR "is an important tool for raising awareness about human development around the world." UNDP started to produce regional HDRs in 1994 and to date has produced 33 reports. Over $130 million has been spent on the global and regional HDRs produced since 2004.

5. Global HDRs do not have stated goals to ascertain their contribution against a predetermined set of aims. General Assembly resolution 57/264 and relevant UNDP Executive Board decisions, however, specify broad objectives for the report, resource allocations to the Human Development Report Office (HDRO) and consultative processes to be followed. Regional HDRs are part of the contribution to the outcomes of the regional programmes managed by the UNDP regional bureaux or in a few cases are framed as an outcome of the regional programme.

6. The evaluation presupposed that the global and regional HDRs contribute to generating debates about development that are of wide relevance across countries; and, more specifically, that the HDR cross-country analysis contributes to processes

that promote policies oriented towards human development and as global public goods, the global and regional HDRs have the potential to inform public policy processes. The evaluation therefore included analysis of HDR contributions to the following national policy process areas: (a) policy discourse; (b) policy advice; (c) advocacy; and (d) agenda- setting. The following sections present the findings, conclusions and recommendations for global and regional HDRs. The findings and conclusions distinguish between three interrelated aspects of the global and regional HDRs: (a) their perceived utility; (b) use; and (c) actual contributions to public policy processes.

## III. Contribution of global Human Development Reports to public policy processes

### Findings

7. **Reach and utility of global HDRs**. The global HDRs were used to a greater extent in the public policy processes at the national level compared to global and regional public debates. The degree to which each global HDR was used varied considerably across the reports and among the different groups of development actors. The global HDRs did not have a niche audience and the extent of use was low among policy intermediaries (civil society organizations (CSOs), academicians, think tanks). In a majority of cases, their use by government actors was contingent upon use by policy intermediaries. Therefore, low use by policy intermediaries decreased the level of use by government actors and policymakers. The global HDRs were not well targeted at different groups of development actors, thus reducing their potential for use in public policy processes. The use of global HDRs by CSOs has decreased over the years. Many civil society actors find the global HDRs increasingly lacking in striking messages that can be used in advocacy. Overall, the Human Development Index (HDI) was the most used content of the report.

8. There was significant variation in how long a particular report remained relevant. The subjects covered by the global HDRs were a factor in determining the interest shown and longevity of use by development actors. The ability of global HDRs to provide thought leadership largely rested on whether they followed the trend of contemporary development themes or raised critical development issues that were not widely discussed in policy debates.

9. **Influence on public policy processes**. Global HDRs contributed to bridging the concept and application of human development to development policy. The uniqueness of the approach, and the policy boundaries that the report could push, determined the level of contribution of the global HDRs. There were some outstanding reports that contributed to public debate and policy processes at the national level. The global HDRs helped to familiarize policymakers with the human development perspective.

10. Development actors typically had high expectations regarding the distinctness of the global HDRs vis-à-vis other publications. Factors that distinguished the global HDRs which were used more and contributed to public policy processes included distinctive human development concepts, tools for analysing development issues, perspectives that differed from mainstream thinking and boldness in communicating difficult, often controversial messages. Articulating a human development approach in a simple manner increased the use of HDRs and their and level of influence on policy processes. In the more recent reports, overcaution diluted the message, at times compromising on prioritizing key messages. Too many broad ideas presented in the report diluted the key messages, so that the reports contributed only in a

limited way to public policy debates. The focus of the report moved away from striking messages on enhancing human development to an array of information.

11. Global HDRs had limited influence on UNDP strategies and programmes. As there was no expectation that global HDRs should inform UNDP programmes, a systematic approach to using the global HDRs was lacking. When some country offices invested time and resources to assimilate the information presented in the reports, they found them to be useful in clarifying concepts and providing examples of best practices from countries across regions.

12. The HDI has become the trademark of global HDRs and has sustained the interest of policymakers, the media and academics, particularly at the national level. When it was introduced in 1990, the HDI provided an alternate development measurement that would generate discussion on the human development dimensions of public policies and global benchmarking. Over the years, beyond its use in comparing performances of countries, the importance of HDI as an advocacy tool has declined. The interest in the HDI did not always generate new policy debates, in addition to what education and health data already did. The HDI was seen inadvertently to divert attention away from development disparities and inequalities instead of highlighting them. Policymakers preferred using national data for development trends and performance monitoring, and the HDI was not seen to provide any additional insights other than what was already known.

13. Several factors reduced the standing of the HDI. Frequent revisions to its methodology in the past five years and the lack of adequate communication about the changes undermined the credibility of the index and contributed to the perception of a lack of transparency in its calculation. The HDI methodology has been quite dynamic and has changed very frequently. This has led to difficulties in comparing and interpreting the indices over time. The other issue was the outdated data used in the calculation of the HDI. UNDP did not engage in addressing country-level data constraints or management of development data. Although not typical of indices used in HDRs, national data were not used in calculating the HDI and there were significant data integrity issues. There were concerns over discrepancies between the international data used in HDI calculation and national data.

14. The global Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) did not receive much attention from development actors, although national-level computation of these indices has generated interest in some countries. There was low interest in global IHDI and MPI and indices such as MPI were largely perceived as less useful for public policy than income, health and education data.

15. The global HDR policy recommendations informed policy processes when the report took a clear position on the subject discussed. The reports of the past five years often compromised on core messages and hence made limited contributions to transformative debates. In a majority of cases, the global HDRs did not provide practical solutions to human development challenges. While this was a deliberate strategy, most development actors perceived it as a weakness of the report.

16. **Gender and human development.** The global HDRs made sustained efforts to develop gender-related composite indices. Overall awareness of the gender indices was low across countries with the exception of development actors working on gender-related issues. Notwithstanding their limitations, the 1995 Gender-related Development Index (1995-GDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII) were used as benchmarks for women's progress in several countries. On the other hand, the thematic analyses of global HDRs were not effective in communicating messages to address gender inequality. The global HDRs varied in the attention paid to gender

inequality from a capability perspective. The reports addressed gender differences in terms of opportunities to achieve key functions such as shelter, good health and education. What was often missing was the analysis of factors related to the society and individual that are critical for ensuring these functions for women.

17. **Communicating global HDR messages.** The ineffective dissemination of key messages constrained the full potential of global HDRs in influencing thematic areas. UNDP did not adequately promote the reports beyond global and country report launches. Poor dissemination of global HDR messages reduced the use of the reports' thematic content.

18. **Management of the global HDRs**. The credibility of the global HDRs depended on the analytical and intellectual leadership the HDRO could provide; the choice of the HDRO Director was seen as crucial for this leadership. The editorial discretion of global HDRs was central to General Assembly resolution 57/264, and it has been critical that the HDRs avoid political pressures pertaining to their content. The extent to which this 'firewall' was ensured varied across reports, and recent reports have inadequately employed the editorial discretion which the HDRO could exercise.

**Conclusions**

19. **Conclusion 1: For a quarter century, the global HDRs have made major contributions to shaping the global development debate. More specifically, the contribution of global HDRs in taking the concept of human development to mainstream development policy has been important. A strength of the reports is their power of repetition – continuously producing annual messages on human development using different themes.**

20. When first produced, the global HDRs promoted a human development framework that was distinctive at the time when the old development paradigm, structural adjustment and the free-market economy were becoming discredited. Global HDRs provided the language to articulate limitations of the neoliberal economic model and provided a different paradigm about development and well-being. The use of a composite index of economic and social indicators has been particularly useful to this paradigm shift. Although the imperfections of the HDI are criticized by development actors at the country level, the report itself was widely perceived as an important innovation in development measurement. Although the concepts seem self-evident today, the global HDRs initiated the discussion of measurement of human development and comparison between countries.

21. Global HDRs presented a simple, understandable and relatable development narrative that is based on the capabilities approach. In general, global HDRs successfully adhered to the human development framework in the themes analysed by individual reports, although this was stronger in some reports than others. Its consistent use of the human development framework is the particular strength of the HDR. The profile and authority of the founding authors of the report has been a key factor in generating widespread acceptance of the concept and its more popular measurement indices. UNDP should be credited for the institutional backing it provided to this intellectual exercise.

22. The global HDRs were political when first published and continue to be so. In gaining the acceptability of a range of countries (including greater acceptability by the countries of the global South), the reports have made immense contributions in promoting human development as a legitimate issue in the overall progress of a country. Despite its role as guardian of a more inclusive, Southern-owned model of development, prior to the HDRs the United Nations typically had not measured and

ranked countries. In this regard, the global HDRs made accomplishments in fostering the human development movement. The contribution of global HDRs in reinforcing an alternative perspective to development in public policy discourse at the country level has been significant. There is a greater acceptance of the human development approach in development planning than there was two decades ago. Although this cannot be fully attributed to the global HDRs alone, their contribution has been important.

23. The global HDRs issued from 1990 to 1999 had a significant influence. The human security approach introduced in the 1994 HDR informed discussions in the United Nations. The approach was included in the 2005 World Summit Outcome as a concept to be discussed and formally defined. Similarly, the 1995 HDR focusing on gender was among the earliest global documents that prefaced the Fourth World Conference on Women. At the conference, which resulted in the Beijing Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming was established as a major global strategy for promoting gender equality. The global HDRs during this period provided the intellectual groundwork for the Millennium Summit and the International Development Goals, which later were manifested in the Millennium Development Goals. Different groupings of Member States acknowledged the potential of the global HDRs to create a global consensus on development narratives.

24. The reports from 2000 to 2005 responded to the major global political situation at the time and managed to maintain the momentum of the global HDRs. From 2006 to 2009, there was a shift in the approach of global HDRs and the reports covered a combination of themes, some related to the Millennium Development Goals. The themes had greater sectoral relevance. In the period that followed, since 2010, the global HDRs addressed a range of issues not always significant in terms of ongoing global debates or providing a new perspective, although this period was critical for the post -2015 agenda and the debates on sustainable development goals. This period also marked the erosion of the distinctiveness of the global HDRs and their contribution. While a vast body of knowledge was generated by the past five reports, the ability of the global HDRs to influence global debates and national public policy processes have been diluted significantly. The reports increasingly are losing their reputation as a distinctive human development publication.

25. **Conclusion 2: The global development environment has changed significantly since the global HDRs were first published 25 years ago. For example, today there is less polarization of ideological positions. There is considerable increase in the number of publications and databases that provide global analysis, and global HDRs consistently have to be distinctive to remain relevant. The global HDRs have not kept up with emerging development issues and the changing demands of the knowledge space resulting from a significant increase in the number of research-based publications and numerous data and information channels.**

26. With the exception of three reports, the global HDRs in the past decade were unsuccessful in generating or contributing significantly to global public debates and national policy processes. Instead of providing thought leadership, the reports merely followed current trends and were unable to provide a different perspective on key emerging development issues. The global HDRs to a great extent are trading on the reputation of past reports and have been ineffective in using the intellectual space generated by earlier HDRs. To regain the transformative capacity of the report, the factors responsible for their declining reputation need to be addressed.

27. The concept of human development has increasing appeal and extraordinary resilience. Unlike many other ideas that disappear quickly from the development

discourse, human development is a well-accepted paradigm of development. The human development agenda has just begun and there is considerable work to be done in transforming debates and making public policies more people-oriented. Challenges remain in applying the human development approach to development policies, and the global HDRs were not successful in sustaining the debate to meet these challenges.

28. The global HDRs did not prioritize core messages and hence contributed in a limited way to transformative debates. The reports became a mere consciousness-raising exercise rather than a framework for informing public debates and development policymaking. By being selective in interpreting the human development approach and available evidence, over the years the reports' arguments have become unpersuasive. There has been less innovation of late in advancing the human development approach and its application, even taking into account the MPI and the work on inequality. The contents of some of the reports in the past decade do not justify the 'human development' title.

29. The standing of the global HDRs has been considerably reduced. The global HDRs are increasingly compromised when dealing with conflicting perspectives, weakening the reports' relevance for public debate and policy. An increasing tendency for political correctness in the presentation of analysis and policy recommendations has reduced the reports' usefulness in informing policy changes, at times defeating the very purpose of the global HDRs.

30. The global HDRs have moved away from their original emphasis on the human development narrative to indices, and over the years indices have become an end in themselves. The excessive attention to indices, although not intended, has undermined the original purpose of the report, to draw attention to the human development approach in public policies.

31. **Conclusion 3: Too many indices produced by the global HDRs have weakened their usefulness for human development discourse as well as their significance for public policy processes. The discussion on global HDRs increasingly have been diverted by indices rather than generating debate on the human development approach pertaining to the theme of the report. The HDI is losing its relevance and needs to be revisited.**

32. The HDI has been powerful in bringing the attention to human development issues through a simple index and has remarkable political and advocacy appeal. While the decision to create an HDI broke new ground in the 1990s, its continued relevance lies in addressing the various limitations to suit the changed context. The HDI has ceased to serve the purpose for which it was developed. With the changed context and significant increase in gross domestic product (GDP) across countries, there is closer correlation of the HDI with GDP, without comparable improvement in actual human development. The disproportionate influence of the three elements has reduced the ability of index to capture a country's human development measure. The index in the present form has limitations in generating public policy debate or informing public policy processes, and can be potentially misleading in setting policy agendas. At a time when there is greater recognition of the human development approach internationally, the HDI in its present form in some ways has become counterproductive. There is a need for a better composite index for human development.

33. Less significant revisions to HDI further diminished its credibility and the leadership the HDRs could provide in measuring human development. What is needed are not minor modifications of the index, but rather an index that reduces GDP-driven variations in the human development measurement. The revisions made

to address the shortcomings of the index were not well thought out and did not address the fundamental issues.

34. In the past decade, global HDRs used six other indices besides HDI; and currently six indices are used. The IHDI and MPI, while contributing to human development thinking, have limited relevance for national public policy debates. Given the long data time lag, they have limited utility as a global index. The IHDI and MPI are more suited for use at the national level, with appropriate adjustments to suite the particular situation of the country. Notwithstanding their conceptual and methodological limitations, the various gender indices (1995-GDI, GII, Gender Empowerment Measurement and the 2014 GDI[1]) provided a benchmark and global comparison on the progress of women. However, they did not provide any additional understanding of either well-being or empowerment.

35. Although not typical to global HDR indices, data time lag is a major issue in the relevance of most indices. Despite having published HDIs for a quarter century, UNDP did not proactively engage in addressing issues related to country-level data constraints or management. This is understandable given that UNDP does not have a role in generating or disseminating data. However, as a user of data for compiling HDIs, UNDP for a long period eluded its responsibility of ensuring that the data used are adequately current. UNDP did not work with other United Nations agencies in supporting national statistical institutions to strengthen their capacities and practices.

36. **Conclusion 4: There was limited interest shown by UNDP to promote the messages of the global HDRs; and the disconnect between the HDRO and the UNDP programme units was a contributing factor.**

37. There has been a marked shift from the time when UNDP consciously signalled to the world the value it attached to human development. There is no formal institutional arrangement within UNDP to promote the practice of human development, although the organization underscores human development as its programming principle. With regard to the global HDRs, there is no mechanism to convert the ideas put forward in the reports into action, which significantly undermines their influence on UNDP programmes and strategies. The unexciting reports of recent years further contributed to the lack of interest among UNDP staff in the global HDRs, and the ownership of the flagship report within UNDP has decreased considerably.

38. Managing various trade-offs by HDRO was critical to maximizing both the UNDP development presence globally and its extensive country presence. For the HDRO, there are trade-offs in being an independent office and at the same time depending on UNDP programme units for dissemination of messages and for drawing on the country offices' knowledge base. There are also trade-offs in producing thought-provoking reports that may not have relevance for UNDP programming; or may generate controversies for UNDP programmes. HDRO has not been effective in managing the trade-offs with UNDP and increasingly has been alienated within the organization. One of the consequences is the decreasing interest in the global HDRs within UNDP.

39. The recommendations of the global HDRs remain in the realm of ideas and minimal efforts are made to contextualize them and make them actionable. Inadequate mechanisms to discuss the messages of the HDR and engage key policy

[1] The global HDR introduced two gender indices, the first in 1995 and the second in 2014. While both use the same acronym, the computation of the indices is different.

actors have reduced the possibility of converting ideas into action and resulted in the reports often fading away after the launch.

40. **Conclusion 5: In its resolution 57/264, the General Assembly recalled that HDR is "the result of an independent intellectual exercise" and should be "undertaken in a neutral and transparent manner". The resolution is significant and allows the reports to generate human development-oriented public debate. In recent years, the HDRO did not use the mandate to make the global HDRs thought-provoking reports with a clear and strong message.**

41. The legitimacy of the global HDRs lies in the forthrightness of messages and transparent analysis to contribute to transformative debates. In recent years, the leadership of HDRO was not successful in fulfilling this role.

42. Intellectual inputs to the reports have weakened considerably over the years. A weak research base and the inability of the HDRO to bring fresh ideas to the global HDRs have reduced the intellectual rigour of the analysis and policy positioning of the reports. The HDRO is not adequately equipped in terms of research capacities to be able to present human development analysis in new ways that will have a long-lasting influence on how people think about development. A related issue was the inability of the HDRO to draw on the scholarship of countries of the global South.

43. The influence of the global HDRs is inherently related to their use by policy intermediaries, and CSOs have always been the strongest allies of the reports. However, interest in the report and its messages among the civil society actors has declined considerably. Both the HDRO and UNDP have not cultivated this group adequately, resulting in the diminishing advocacy value of the reports.

44. The HDRO process for preparing the report does not reflect the General Assembly mandate to undertake full and effective consultations with Member States. The HDRO has been excessively guarded about the content of the report until the day of launch. The opportunity to share various drafts to generate debate, even if it was contentious, was lost. The reports compromised on messages and tried to please everyone, a situation which can be avoided by sharing analysis and draft reports for discussion.

45. The cost implications of global HDR production are substantial and the quality of the report does not reflect the resources invested in it. Also, the imbalance between the production cost and the resources allocated for dissemination has done a great disservice to the report, seriously undermining its contribution.

**Recommendations**

46. **Recommendation 1: Given its positive reputation, the global HDR has the potential to keep human development on the agenda of public debate and policy process. The time is ideal to relaunch the idea of human development much more strategically, and to help UNDP regain the intellectual space in the global development discourse that it once commanded. It is also recommended that factors causing damage to the reputation of the report and its contribution be addressed.**

47. There is a gap in ideas and perspectives about human development and the policymaking process. Transformative ideas are needed to address the development challenges posed by the downside of globalization, e.g., increasing inequality and insecurity, as well as growing environmental and other threats. The global HDRs have a critical role to play in generating these ideas. UNDP should make concerted efforts to ensure that the global HDRs provide powerful messages to further human development, and should continue publishing the annual global HDR.

48. The legitimacy of the global HDR lies in the forthrightness of its messages and its transparent analysis. To contribute to transformative debates, the global HDR should not shy away from difficult messages. The indices cannot be a substitute for the new perspective and strong thematic analysis the report is expected to provide. Each report should aim to push the boundaries of development thinking, focusing on issues and perspectives that previously were neglected in public policy debates. The reports should take a strong policy position, even if it does not align with current development thinking.

49. The strength of the global HDR is the human development framework. Specific efforts should be made to ensure that the reports have a strong human development perspective and widen the conceptualization and policy application of human development.

50. **Recommendation 2: UNDP should revisit the purpose of human development indices and examine their added value to the messages of the reports. Given the issues related to computation and data, HDRO should not clutter the report with composite indices which have limited value.**

51. Composite indices such as the MPI, IHDI and GII, however sophisticated, have serious limitations when calculated at the global level because of data limitations, subjectivity in the choice of the variables and the weights attached. UNDP should reconsider using these measures at a global level.

52. The global MPI has limited value for national public policymaking or for global comparisons. As MPI works best when adapted to suit national contexts and specificities, UNDP should promote its use at the national level.

53. **Recommendation 3: There have been efforts by the HDRO in recent years to address various criticisms related to methodology of the HDI, and there have been revisions to the index. While important, these efforts are not sufficient to address the fundamental limitations of the HDI. To be able to achieve greater policy and analytical influence, consider reconstructing the HDI following a thorough review.**

54. The value of HDI lies in its ability to provide a simple and reliable measure of a country's human development and its potential to inform public debate. It is recommended that HDRO carry out a comprehensive review of HDI, carefully thinking through its various components and implications in terms of data and other issues, and address fundamental methodological issues.

55. It is recommended that HDRO have a policy to ensure that the methodology of the indices is not changed frequently, and there should be a fixed period of time for undertaking any revisions. Changes to the methodology should be well thought out to avoid frequent revisions. It is also recommended that HDRO should ensure transparency in the methodologies used to develop the indices.

56. **Recommendation 4: UNDP should take adequate measures to enhance the influence of the global HDR on the public policy process. The role of UNDP programme units is extremely important in this regard.**

57. UNDP should take measures to promote key messages of the global HDR. Each global HDR should be followed by a corporate policy brief on the messages the various programme units should pursue. Sufficient measures should be taken to systematically improve the contextualization and dissemination of the messages.

58. UNDP should operationalize the corporate Knowledge Management Strategy, 2014-2017 to enhance the contribution of UNDP publications, including the global HDR. Because the resources allocated for the global HDR are not adequate for

dissemination of the report's messages, UNDP should address the imbalance between the report's production costs and the funds for disseminating its messages. A related but equally important issue that needs to be addressed is setting aside additional funds for advancing the practice of human development.

59. **Recommendation 5: The management of the global HDRs needs to be adequately strengthened to provide a stable environment for preparation of the report and to enhance the reputation of the reports.**

60. To be influential, the global HDR must stimulate new ideas and provide thought- provoking analysis that can generate policy debates and inform public policy processes. By its very nature, the global HDR is bound to address important issues that will give rise to diverse views and interests. UNDP should guarantee strong leadership for the HDRO to guide the hugely intellectual and political exercise of preparing the global HDR.

61. Several management issues need to be addressed which are critical for producing global HDRs that are credible and thought provoking. The evaluation considered as key issues the tenure of the HDRO Director and the mechanisms in place to handle transition; scheduling of the report's preparation; and research and data management. To address these issues, the evaluation suggests the following:

(a) UNDP should revisit the current model of HDRO Director, who is the lead author of the report. Given the intensity of the task of leading the global HDR, this model has proven to be less than effective. UNDP should consider a model in which the HDRO Director manages the office and there are lead authors for each report. The lead author will be a senior researcher with international standing in the subject of the report, who will work closely with the HDRO in preparing the report. This will allow HDRO to plan the reports ahead of time as another lead author can work on the subsequent report. Having reputable researchers and experts as lead authors will enhance the credibility and standing of the global HDR. The Director of the HDRO can have a longer term (of five years) and the primary responsibility of managing the process and liaising with UNDP. This approach will also address leadership transition issues that face HDRO every time there is a change of Director;

(b) The report schedule needs to be addressed. There should be a clearly determined time frame for producing the reports, allowing sufficient time for discussion of various drafts. HDRO should put in place mechanisms that will allow the preparation of a new report well ahead in time while the previous report is being concluded. This would require revamping the research team. The model suggested above will address some of these issues;

(c) There should be specific measures in place to ensure a credible research process, particularly in using illustrations. There should be adequate checks and balances to ensure robustness of research;

(d) The HDRO should review its data sources, and explore options to reduce the time lag and variances in national and international data. HDRO should engage with UNDP country offices to better collaborate with national statistical offices.

62. While retaining its editorial discretion, the HDRO should move away from the guarded approach to report production to more open consultations. Specific measures should be taken by HDRO to strengthen the consultation process. Robust mechanisms should be in place to share content as it evolves so as to generate debate. There should be extensive consultations in developing countries during the report preparation process, involving Governments, CSOs and scholars.

63. The HDRO should make specific efforts to broaden the academic research and intellectual base of global HDRs. The HDRO should develop more structured research partnerships to enable new ideas as well as to draw on a wider research. It is critical that HDRO use scholars from a wide range of countries, particularly from the South.

64. The permanent research team of HDRO should include new additions for each report not only to bring fresh research perspective but also to build on networks of academics and researchers to strengthen the reports. Efforts should be made to develop a programme that would allow scholars to work for HDRO for a short period. This is essential to revitalize the team for every report and to strengthen the capacities of the HDRO.

## IV. Contribution of regional Human Development Reports to public policy processes

### Findings

65. **Reach and utility of regional HDRs**. The goals of the regional HDRs – to play a catalytic role through research and data compiled on topics that have policy relevance, spur action on policy areas that are relevant for human development at the regional and national level, and engage a broader audience in public policy debates – imply that a range of regional- and national-level actors will use the regional HDRs, and that these actors will be pathways to inform regional policy discourse and national public policy processes.

66. National-level actors used the regional HDRs comparatively more than regional-level actors. Overall, about a quarter of the regional HDRs were used. Across all regions, some reports were used more than others and the use of the regional HDRs is contingent upon their themes and policy relevance to the country. Poor awareness of regional HDRs significantly affected the level of their use.

67. Regional HDRs informed UNDP regional programmes where possible and some regional HDRs enhanced the intellectual standing of UNDP in the region. The regional HDRs enabled UNDP to engage with a wide range of development actors on issues of critical policy relevance to the region. Regional HDRs were used by UNDP country offices to identify further avenues of engagement with government. Across regions, the regional HDRs were perceived as being used more by UNDP country offices than other development actors.

68. **Informing public policy processes**. In each region, there were instances of regional HDRs contributing to public policy processes. The regional HDRs responded to the research and analysis needs of countries with inadequate research capacities. Overall, given their limited use, it was extremely challenging for regional HDRs to contribute to public policy processes at the regional and national levels.

69. The reputation of UNDP as a neutral agency makes it particularly suited for initiating sensitive discussions. Regional HDR themes generally responded to issues that were relevant to multiple countries, (e.g., gender, corruption, citizen security); too sensitive to address within a single country (e.g., freedom, human security, gender, corruption, inclusion, HIV/AIDS); those with inherent cross-border dimensions (e.g., trade on human terms, three reports on citizen security); or where solutions to a country's problems depend on the cooperation of others (e.g., regional cooperation, climate change).

70. The quality of a report, while important, was not always a factor in determining whether it contributed to public policy debates or processes. Development actors considered the regional HDRs to be good sources for reference, but the analysis and policy recommendations were not always adequate to generate policy debate. What distinguishes a regional HDR from other reports is its human development framework, and there were mixed views on whether regional HDRs provided a human development perspective.

71. The regional HDRs responded to the research and analysis needs of countries with limited resources for such work. The regional HDRs were also more useful to countries that had recently emerged from civil war where there was a need for 'neutral spaces' to lessen the legacies of polarization, to mediate among contending forces and to use data and analysis to learn from successful development models.

72. **Gender and human development**. The two regional HDRs on women's empowerment were important in emphasizing gender equality in public policy. In a complex and sensitive public policy environment, the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* provided a discursive space to debate issues that are fundamental to women's empowerment in the region. The report, *Power, Voices and Rights: A Turning Point for Equality in Asia and the Pacific* provided a comparative analysis of gender disparities and development in countries in that region.

73. Across regions, there was a preference to use publications that analysed development themes from a gender perspective. The regional HDRs fell short on gender analysis, particularly from a human development perspective. The regional HDRs were not always an important source of gender analysis on the subject covered, and there has been limited evidence of their contribution to gender-related policy processes.

74. **Factors that affected regional HDR contributions**. It was hard for regional HDRs to find a niche at the regional or national level. Intergovernmental actors, policymakers and advocacy organizations had limited awareness of the regional HDRs. It was difficult for the regional HDRs to gain the attention of development actors, unlike the global HDRs which had the advantage of the HDI to secure development actors' attention, or the national HDRs, which have direct policy relevance to the country.

75. The regional HDRs had the challenging task of remaining relevant in a policy context in which other, regularly published publications with regional analysis of key development issues are increasingly available. In many cases, development actors preferred reports from agencies with subject specialization. Regional HDRs did not have a distinctive value when compared to other publications on similar subjects.

76. When possible, partnerships with regional institutions were used to promote the messages of the regional HDRs. In a majority of cases, the regional institutions were not adequately engaged in the preparation of these reports, leading to poor ownership of the reports. The timing of the reports and the topics addressed are important if the reports are to inform regional intergovernmental policy processes.

77. The audience for the regional HDRs was not always clear. UNDP did not find the right balance in engaging different groups of development actors in promoting human development messages. UNDP also did not proactively reach out to CSOs or think tanks during preparation of regional HDRs or dissemination of their messages

78. Policymakers and advocacy actors expressed a marked preference for regional HDRs with a subregional focus. Reports which had a subregional focus or included

only a few countries were found to be more useful in informing public policy processes. The geographical and transboundary approach, covering critical development challenges that are relevant to a group of countries, was found to have greater policy relevance.

79. **Communicating regional HDR messages**. The regional HDRs lacked the profile of the global and national HDRs. The strategies used to disseminate regional HDRs and their messages were not sufficient to provide necessary visibility. Across regions, national and global HDRs were comparatively discussed more. The regional HDRs could not generate a similar appeal at the regional level (with the exception of those for the Arab States region).

80. The primary UNDP communication strategy appears to be overwhelmingly focused on the mainstream media, which has a limited attention span. UNDP has not been effective in using social media to disseminate key messages of its reports. Because they are published at the regional level, it was often difficult for the regional HDRs to attract the attention of mainstream media, even when the report was launched in the country.

81. Regional bureaux have made specific efforts to engage country offices in the preparation of the regional HDRs and to facilitate their use for UNDP programme support. While country offices acknowledge this, the consultations were insufficient to maximize the use and influence of the reports. Similar to global HDRs, there is a lack of clarity on the role of country offices in disseminating the messages of the reports. In some regions, there was a lack of headquarters support to the country offices to build on the momentum generated by the regional HDRs.

82. Different approaches were used to manage the production of the regional HDRs. Although there are guidelines on the quality criteria for regional HDRs, there was considerable variation across the bureaux in terms of their operationalization. The regional HDRs were better managed when there were dedicated senior-level staff engaged fully in the preparation process. The lack of a systemic approach to regional HDRs has resulted in the reports becoming an output rather than a tool for UNDP to engage in public policy debates.

**Conclusions**

83. **Conclusion 1: The regional HDRs have yet to distinguish themselves from other regional publications of UNDP. The standard for what constitutes a HDR has yet to be fully internalized, although this is necessary to find a distinctive space among the array of regional-level publications.**

84. The comparative advantage of the regional HDRs vis-à-vis other publications is the human development dimension which the reports bring to the analysis of development themes. The regional HDRs could not position themselves as distinctive publications at the regional or national levels. A key weakness of the regional HDRs was the lack of a strong human development framework. Besides bringing new perspectives and evidence-based policy options, it is critical that the regional HDRs be guided by the human development framework. The regional HDRs were not effective in achieving this and were thus less successful in bringing a new dimension to development policy.

85. Thought leadership and human development analysis of themes are key to the success of regional HDRs. The reports that contributed to transformative debates, as in the case of HDRs covering the Arab States, had powerful messages challenging existing development practices. With notable exceptions, the regional HDRs have made limited contributions to regional and national public policy process and to

UNDP programmes. A lack of bold policy propositions, weak human development analysis and poor dissemination of the reports' messages undermined the use and contribution of the regional HDRs.

86. There is no corporate policy on the purposes of HDRs published at different levels, on the intended audience and how the HDRs are distinct from other UNDP publications. There is also no organization-wide perspective on how regional actors should be engaged or if regional HDRs are an appropriate tool for doing so. As a result, the purposes of regional HDRs are interpreted differently, and the objective of informing public policy process could not be achieved.

87. The comparative advantage of the regional HDRs vis-à-vis global and national HDRs is not adequately taken into account in the development of regional HDRs. While it is important to respond to region-specific issues, the reports were poorly aligned either with the themes of the global HDR or national HDR, and as standalone analysis were not able to create a niche in the development discourse. The regional HDRs, while located in the regional programmes, were not able to establish their value and have largely become merely another UNDP regional publication.

88. **Conclusion 2: Clarity on who are the primary users of the report is critical to ensure that the reports focus on their intended audience. It was not clear who is the audience of the reports. In the attempt to reach different groups of development actors at the regional and national levels, the regional HDRs have diluted their messages.**

89. The lack of a clear target audience undermined the influence of the regional HDRs. There is an ambiguity about how to relate to regional policy actors, particularly regional intergovernmental bodies or civil society actors. The regional HDRs did not establish a niche audience, and were not successful in informing regional institutions' policy processes or policy advocacy at the regional and national levels.

90. **Conclusion 3: Lack of gender analysis from a human development perspective and related policy propositions diluted the contribution of the report. The regional HDRs missed the opportunity to expand the conceptual boundaries of gender-related constraints in pursuing individual goals and interests. The reports did not provide new policy perspectives that would challenge output-oriented development practices.**

91. The regional HDRs were not always an important source of gender analysis on the subject covered, and there has been limited evidence of their contribution to gender-related policy processes. The regional HDRs included gender-disaggregated analysis, but systematic analysis of gender from a human development framework was either limited or lacking altogether. With sparse policy recommendations and weak gender analysis, the advocacy value of the reports remained limited.

**Recommendations**

92. **Recommendation 1: UNDP should revisit the purpose of the regional HDRs and explore options to strengthen the contribution made by the reports. UNDP should not publish thematic regional HDRs unless there is something significant to talk about. It is imperative that the reports have a strong human development perspective. UNDP should take adequate measures to enhance the influence of regional HDRs on regional and national policy processes.**

93. To strengthen the contribution of the regional HDRs to public policy processes at the regional and national levels, UNDP should revisit the purposes of the regional

HDRs in relation to the global and national HDRs. UNDP should ensure that regional HDRs capitalize on the global and national reports and pay specific attention to strengthening the policy and advocacy dimension of the regional reports, in term of sustained follow-up activities. Specific efforts should be made to strengthen human development analysis and gender analysis in the regional HDRs.

94. Every region has issues that merit a regional publication. The regional HDRs should add value beyond what is offered by publications of other organizations. UNDP should not publish regional HDRs on themes that are widely researched and published, unless it brings an additional dimension to the debate. UNDP should explore the option of regional HDRs providing human development analysis and only periodically produce thematic reports that can contribute to development discourse and public policy and provide a new perspective.

95. **Recommendation 2: The subregional scope of the regional HDRs proved to be a useful approach both to cover issues that are specific to a few countries or subregion and also provide in-depth analysis. This approach should be thought through and adequately strategized for a greater impact of regional HDRs.**

96. Important lessons can be drawn from the regional HDRs with a subregional focus in Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the CIS, and the Latin America and the Caribbean. Given the specificities of different groups of countries in the region, UNDP should consider publishing regional HDRs with a subregional focus. Regional HDRs should be used specifically to provide human development-oriented data and analysis for regions that are not adequately covered by global research and analysis.

97. **Recommendation 3: Specific attention should be paid to developing systems and processes to communicate and disseminate the messages of regional HDRs. Effective communication and dissemination of the messages is closely related to the knowledge management systems and capacities of UNDP, and this need to be strengthened.**

98. UNDP should effectively implement its Knowledge Management Strategy, 2014-2017 to address the larger issues related to dissemination of messages of its knowledge products. To improve the contribution of the regional HDRs it will be necessary to:

(a) Address issues related to poor dissemination of the messages of the regional HDRs. UNDP should develop a dissemination strategy for its flagship publications, addressing how the HDRs will be promoted through UNDP programmes and activities and clearly spelling out the roles and responsibilities of different programme units;

(b) Provide resources to country offices for dissemination of the messages of reports. In the Asia and the Pacific and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions, additional funds were provided to country offices for communicating the messages of the regional HDRs. Such approaches should be strengthened and institutionalized.